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Zoning for complex discussed

CHARLES TOWN, W.VA.

■ The developers of a planned office complex next to Harpers Ferry (W.Va.) National Historical Park have submitted a request to have the land rezoned.

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Although developers of a proposed office building project next to Harpers Ferry (W.Va.) National Historical Park say they will limit the project to certain types of development, an attorney for the Jefferson County Commission said Thursday the developers could build anything they want on the site if they



can convince the commission to change the land-use designation for the property.

The commissioners learned Thursday that the developers who want to build the office building and hotel project at the Old Standard quarry site along Millville Road have submitted their formal request to have the land rezoned from agricultural to commercial use.

The project has drawn objection from a group of

local residents and federal and local government officials who say the office buildings and hotel would be too close to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

The land where the project would be developed was proposed to be annexed into the City of Charles Town, but the Charles Town City Council turned down the request.

An attorney for the developers previously told the commission that the builders only

would undertake certain types of development at the site.

Attorney J. Michael Cassell said his clients would be able to guarantee what type of development that will occur at the Old Standard quarry site through "contract zoning," Jefferson County Commissioner Rusty Morgan said.

But James Casimiro, an attorney for the commission, said he has not found anything in state law that allows contract zoning.

Therefore, if the commission changes the land-use designation of the property to commercial, the developers would be able to build whatever they want, Casimiro said.

Morgan said he read the developers' petition to rezone the Old Standard property and was not impressed.

"If this is their best shot, it's not good enough," Morgan said.

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Complex: Panel talks about zoning for office project

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Morgan said he does not like the petition because it does not specify who will use the office space. Morgan said it would be better if the developers outlined who will locate to the property — such as the federal government, for example.

"My interest is diminishing," Morgan said.

The developers want to build 2 million square feet of office space on the 410-acre property, as well as a 150-room hotel that will sit along the edge of a 100-foot-deep lake. Cassell said the developers could have up to 1,600 homes on the site, but will not build them. Cassell has said the office project will be an ideal way to increase the number of well-paying jobs in the county and will generate about \$4.4 million in real estate and hotel tax revenue.

Cassell and the developers told the commission two weeks ago they were planning to ask the commission for a

rezoning of the property to allow for the project.

The commissioners on Thursday debated how they should consider the developer's petition to rezone the property.

Commissioner Jim Surkamp said he would like a group of officials including environmental experts, a Harpers Ferry National Historical Park representative, the developers and others to tour the property to get a better feel for the project.

The commission decided to send the rezoning request to the Jefferson County Planning Commission for consideration.

The planning commission should not debate the merits of the project, but only determine if the Old Standard quarry site's land designation should be changed, Casimiro said.

The commission also decided to hold a public hearing on the rezoning request. The public hearing will be held June 12 or earlier.